Mill Residue Production and Use in Montana, 2009

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Introduction

Mill residue is material such as sawdust, planer shavings, sander dust, bark, and chipped slabs, edges, and trim generated as a by-product of manufacturing wood products like lumber and plywood. In Montana, like the other states (ID, OR, and WA) in the NARA region, mill residue could be a potential feedstock for wood-based biofuels. However, mill residue is typically highly utilized, with more than 99% of mill residue volume currently used for other products including energy (Fig. 1). The same attributes that make mill residue more attractive than logging pellet producers, as well as pulp mills.

Methods

The Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER) collects, compiles, and makes available state and county-level data on timber harvest, finished wood products, mill residue, and other aspects of the forest products industries in the western United States. This information is developed through periodic state-wide censuses of timber-processing facilities. The most recent Montana census was conducted for calendar year 2009 operations. Using a written questionnaire, phone interview, or in-person interview, the following information is gathered from each timber-processing facility:

- facility type, location, contact information, and opening date
- installed equipment and employment
- shift and annual production capacity in units of output
- preferred and accepted log sizes
- volume of raw material received by timber product, county, and ownership
- species and live/dead proportions of timber received
- finished product types, volumes, sales value, and market locations
- production, utilization, and sales of manufacturing residue

Results & Discussion

Montana mills generate substantial quantities of mill residue, however, the volume of residue per unit of mill output has been decreasing through time, and the portion of residue going unused has likewise been decreasing.

Sawmills generated 81% of the residue produced by wood products facilities in Montana during 2009 (Fig. 3). As sawmills have become more efficient over time, less residue is generated. Perhaps more importantly, the large reduction in lumber production as a result of the recent recession and housing collapse has led to a corresponding reduction in the total volume of residue produced by Montana sawmills (Fig. 4).

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